



Panel 4 - "Need for a bottom-up EU Tourism Services Quality Initiative?"

The Commission Communication¹ *"Europe, the world's N°1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe"* envisages the development of a European Tourism Quality Label, based on existing national experience, to increase consumer security and confidence in tourism products and reward rigorous efforts by tourism professionals whose aim is quality of tourism service for customer satisfaction (action 13).

In 2010, the Commission services started consulting the Member States, the industry and the owners and managers of the existing quality schemes in the tourism sector to identify possible actions to implement this action.

In 2012 the services proposed a "Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an umbrella European Tourism Quality Label". This initiative aimed at tackling mainly the insufficient cooperation between stakeholders to ensure the consistent high-quality of the European tourism product and the lack of comparability and consistency between the existing quality evaluation schemes in tourism so to improve credibility and transparency of the tourism quality evaluation schemes in Europe.

After internal discussions, the decision was taken by the Commission to adopt a less stringent act, namely a proposal for a "Council Recommendation on European Tourism Quality Principles" which was finally adopted by the Commission on 20 February 2014.

The Recommendation set out principles to be applicable by public and private organizations providing services in the field of tourism directly to consumers, in the areas of training, consumer satisfaction, cleaning and maintenance plan and information to consumers.

Following this, the Greek Presidency organized four Working Party meetings for the adoption by the Competitiveness Council. A strong opposition was expressed by a number of Member States who claimed that the proposal would undermine the EU's reputation as a promoter of quality and competitiveness.

These Member States, representing a blocking minority, while agreeing on the broad aim of the initiative (namely, "to provide added value in particular for SMEs, by helping to "enhance the visibility of their high-quality services and to improve their ability to reach out to a wider circle of customers" including in third countries"), considered that the introduction of common principles 'from above' would have not helped in achieving these aims.

These Member States declared that improving the quality is first and foremost up to businesses themselves, which is also the position of the European industry at large.

Nevertheless, they considered that "the EU can do much to support the efforts of Member States to enhance the quality and competitiveness of Europe's tourist industry, and take steps towards building the internal market". Three possible initiatives were suggested to be taken by the Commission:

¹ COM(2010) 352 final



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- (a) Building on the Commission's comprehensive research, best practice be identified and exchanged and used to develop specific guidance documents and toolkits to improve quality in tourism - including on the development of quality assurance schemes and standards.
- (b) Help and advice be offered in how to establish and implement well-developed quality schemes. The Commission could make use of the new interest among standards bodies in services such as tourism, as well as their expertise in bringing industry together. The demand for, and content of, standards and labels must come from the industry and its stakeholders, and developed through tried and trusted processes.
- (c) The Commission make use of the analysis it has already done in order to identify the unique qualities that European tourist services already offer.

DISCUSSION POINTS:

1. Do you think there is scope for a EU Tourism Services Quality Initiative?
2. Should it be based on a bottom-up approach? Who should be involved?
3. What should be the outcomes?
4. Would you be ready to engage?